

For LGBTQ Community

Same-Sex Partner Violence MYTHS

MYTH #1: Only straight women get battered. Men are not victims of partner violence, and women never batter.

REALITY: Such myths ignore and deny the realities of same-sex relationships. Men can be and are victims of partner violence. Women can be and are batterers. Partner violence is fundamentally a power issue. Even when two people are of the same gender, power differences exist and can be abused.

MYTH #2: Partner violence is more common in straight relationships than it is in same-sex relationships.

REALITY: There is no reason whatsoever to assume that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people are less violent than heterosexual men and women. Research on same-sex partner violence can be difficult, given the fact that many of us are not comfortable being open about our relationships, let alone abusive ones. Research that has been done indicates that battering in same-sex relationships is about as common as in heterosexual relationships. It is increasingly agreed that battering presents one of the most significant health risks to GLBT communities today.

MYTH #3: It really isn't violence when a same-sex couple fights. It's just a lover's quarrel, a fair fight between equals.

REALITY: This is based on the false assumption that two people of the same gender have no power differences. It also ignores that fact that in partner violence relationships it is the choice of one partner to take advantage of her or his power in abusive ways. There is nothing fair about being knocked against a wall, being threatened, or enduring endless criticism from an angry lover. Dismissing partner violence as a lover's quarrel trivializes and excuses violence that is just as real, and dangerous, as any in a heterosexual relationship.

MYTH #4: It really isn't violence when gay men fight. It's boys being boys. A man should be able to defend himself.

REALITY: These ideas grow out of a larger societal attitude and the primitive notion that it is acceptable for men to be violent; that it is normal or even appropriately masculine. There is nothing normal or appropriate about partner violence. The vast majority of men and women are not violent, and the majority of same-sex relationships are free of abuse. 'Boys being boys' may have been harmless (or was it?) on the playground at age six, but when you are adult with injuries inflicted by your lover, it is neither normal nor acceptable.

MYTH #5: The batterer is always bigger, stronger, more 'butch'. Victims will always be smaller, weaker, more feminine.

REALITY: Experience with heterosexual battering and attitudes about traditional sex roles lead many to fall into stereotypes of how batterers and victims, respectively, should look and act.

Unfortunately, such stereotypes are of little actual use in helping us to identify who the batterer is in a same-sex relationship. A person who is small, but prone to violence and rage can do a lot of damage to someone who may be taller, heavier, stronger, and non-violent. Size, weight, 'masculinity', 'femininity' or any other physical attribute or role is not a good indicator of whether a person will be a victim or a batterer. A batterer does not need to be 6'1" and built like a rugby player to use a weapon against you, to smash your compact discs, to cut up your clothing, or tell everyone at work that you really are 'queer'.

MYTH #6: Lesbian and Gay partner violence is sexual behavior, a version of S and M. The victim actually likes it.

REALITY: This myth persists because many people try to define and understand GLBT people exclusively through sexual behavior - AND because they mistakenly assume that the majority of GLBT relationships are based on or include sadomasochistic behaviors.

Confusing sadomasochism with battering, in either straight or homosexual relationships, keeps us from facing the reality that partner violence occurs in ALL kinds of relationships, and is not the victim's fault. In consensual sadomasochism or domination scenario, any violence, coercion or domination occurs within the context of a mutually pleasurable 'scene', within which there is trust and/or an agreement between parties about the limits and boundaries of behavior. In contrast, partner violence takes place without any mutual trust or agreement, and is not consensual or pleasurable for the victim, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. A batterer's violent and coercive behaviors don't just affect the sexual relationship, but pervade other aspects of the relationship as well.

MYTH #7: The law does not and will not protect victims of same-sex partner violence.

Within the last ten years, many states have altered laws to be more gender neutral, affording additional protection to anyone who has been abused or threatened by someone they've lived with or had an intimate dating relationship with, regardless of the gender of either party. However, some states don't concretely define one way or the other if victims in homosexual relationships can be protected under partner violence statutes - meaning that it falls to the discretion of law enforcement to take the report, the prosecutor to file the charges and the judge and/or jury to consider the case under partner violence statutes.

Unless your state statutes clearly provide guidance for law and court personnel, even the most issue-conscious and well-meaning police officers, prosecutors and judges don't have the same statutory ability to take action on behalf of same sex victims of partner violence under the umbrella of " partner violence laws" as they have for heterosexual couples. This does NOT mean that action cannot be taken - charges and arrests can and do take place, but for individualized crimes such as assault and battery which typically carries lesser sentences and are easier for an abuser to plead out of or have charges dropped altogether. In more and more cases today, the application of these laws goes smoothly and fairly for victims of same-sex partner violence.

Make sure to check the wording of the partner violence statutes in your state and/or contact your local Gay and Lesbian Community program for further information and legal referrals.

Information on this page was taken from A.A.R.D.V.A.R.C: An Abuse, Rape, and Domestic Violence Aid and Resource Collection.